

After #MeToo: Perceptions of Sexual Harassment In and Out of the Workplace

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Background & Purpose

In conjunction with the #MeToo movement, the present study identifies perceptions of sexual harassment in workplace and non-workplace settings. Individuals who experience sexual harassment are thrust into states of psychological distress and are known to experience fear, negative moods, and a lowered satisfaction with life in general (NASEM, 2017). Additionally, exhibiting behaviors of sexual harassment in the workplace has a debilitating effect on work groups and individual employees by creating hostile work environments (NASEM, 2017). As a result, employees experience decreased job satisfaction and have a higher likelihood of turnover (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Seeking to phase out phrases such as “I didn’t know that was sexual harassment,” this study examines what behaviors people consider to be “sexual harassment” at work and the discrepancies between perceptions of sexual harassment in work settings versus non-work settings. Additionally, understanding the perceptions of what behaviors constitute sexual harassment is necessary for the development of anti-harassment trainings and anti-harassment policies.

Method

Participants

Participants included 301 undergraduate psychology students from a mid-size southeastern school who were between ages 18-46 years ($M = 20.36$, $SD = 2.00$). Participants were recruited using UTC’s SONA participant registry system to sign up and receive points redeemable for extra credit in applicable courses upon completion of the study.

Procedure

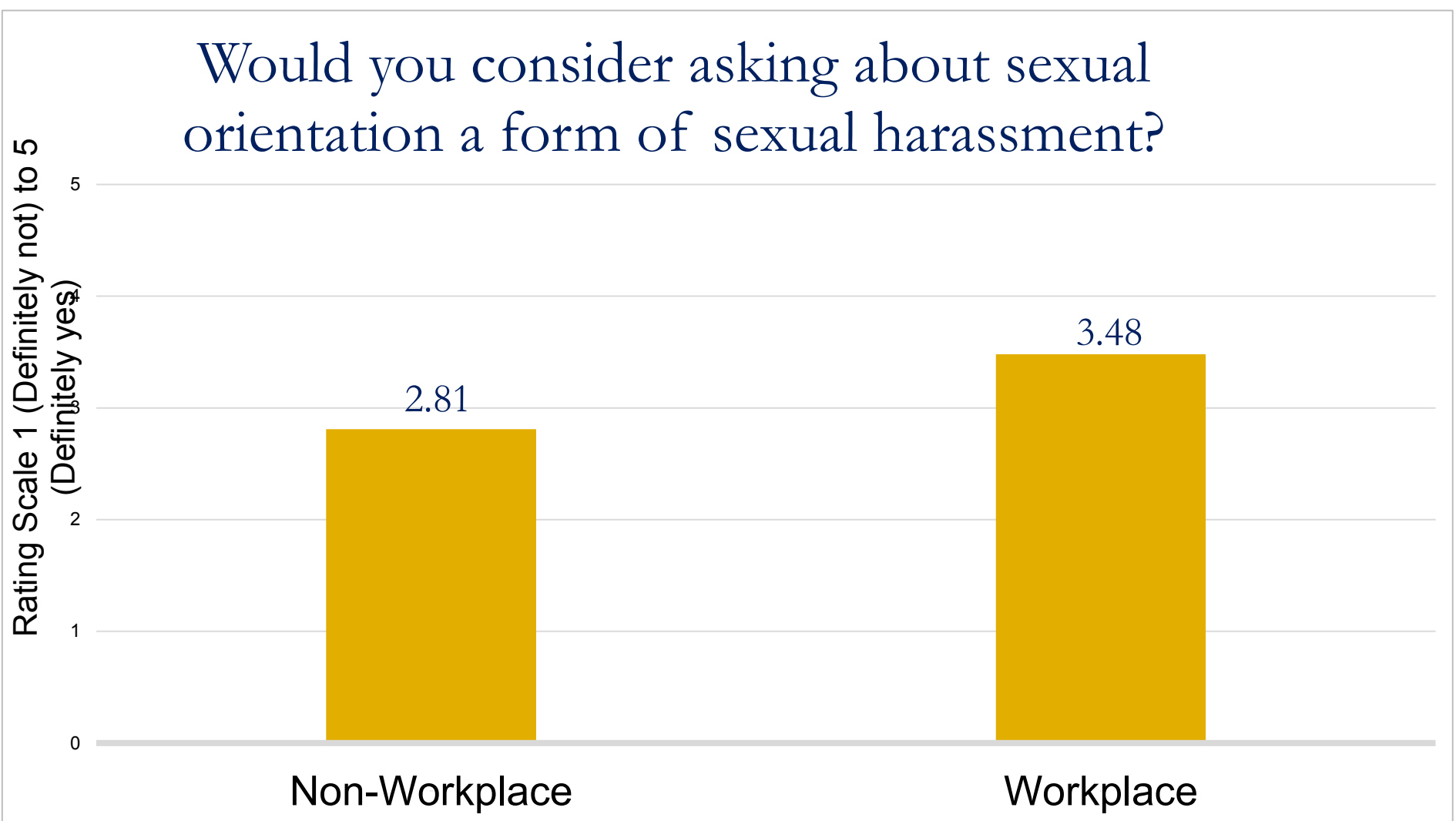
Our data were collected as part of a larger study. Participants answered questions in a survey regarding perceptions of sexual harassment in different settings. We asked mirrored work-setting/non-work-setting questions regarding various behaviors to determine differences in perceptions regarding what behaviors constituted harassment between the two settings. All participants gave informed consent to participate in this study. The study took approximately 45-60 minutes to complete.

Results

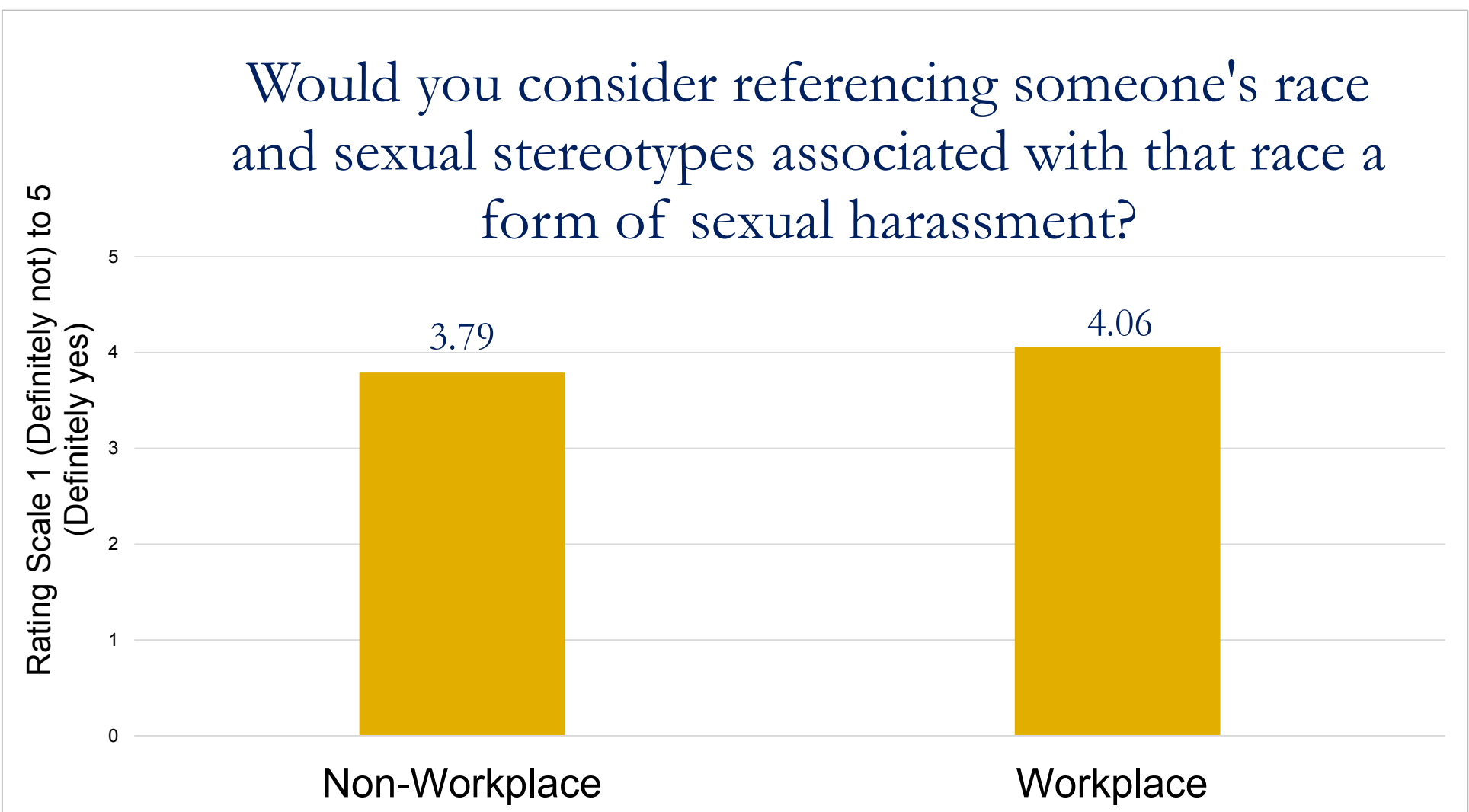
The results presented here are preliminary as we will be analyzing data further into the Spring 2019 semester

Question	Mean	SD
1. Would you consider catcalling a co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	4.02	1.156
2. Would you consider staring at a co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	3.1	1.165
3. Would you consider asking a co-worker on a date a form of sexual harassment?	2.28	1.208
4. Would you consider telling a joke of sexual nature at work a form of sexual harassment?	3.35	1.204
5. Would you consider winking at a co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	2.83	1.168
6. Would you consider asking a co-worker about their personal relationships a form of sexual harassment?	2.93	1.222
7. Would you consider blowing a kiss to a co-worker a form of sexual harassment.	3.19	1.176
8. Would you consider asking your co-worker for their personal phone number a form of sexual harassment?	2.41	1.119
9. Would you consider insisting on walking to your co-workers car with them a form of sexual harassment?	2.64	1.213
10. Would you consider leering at a co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	3.47	1.144
11. Would you consider asking a co-worker their sexual history a form of sexual harassment?	3.53	1.235
12. Would you consider giving your co-worker a hug a form of sexual harassment?	2.57	1.161
13. Would you consider sending your co-worker an email about how nice they look that day a form of sexual harassment?	3.08	1.263
14. Would you consider asking your subordinate co-worker on a date a form of sexual harassment?	2.69	1.292
15. Would you consider showing your co-workers a racy calendar a form of sexual harassment?	3.67	1.26
16. Would you consider commenting on your co-workers body shape a form of sexual harassment?	3.94	1.156
17. Would you consider teasing your co-worker about their sexual orientation a form of sexual harassment?	4.08	1.2
18. Would you consider teasing your co-worker about their sexual history a form of sexual harassment?	4.09	1.213
19. Would you consider making repeated sexual gestures with body language toward a co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	4.36	1.006
20. Would you consider sending an email to your co-worker asking them to join you in a private location a form of sexual harassment?	3.94	1.229
21. Would you consider referencing your co-worker's race and sexual stereotypes associated with that race a form of sexual harassment?	4.06	1.21
22. Would you consider asking your co-worker if they are a virgin a form of sexual harassment?	3.74	1.247
23. Would you consider showing your co-worker a sexual cartoon a form of sexual harassment?	3.96	1.175
24. Would you consider sending your co-worker an email professing your affection for them a form of sexual harassment?	3.42	1.287
25. Would you consider asking your co-worker about their sexual orientation a form of sexual harassment?	3.48	1.318
26. Would you consider groping a co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	4.43	1.005
27. Would you consider sending an email to your co-worker offering to pay them in exchange for sexual favors a form of sexual harassment?	4.43	1.009
28. Would you consider telling your co-workers about your own sexual experiences a form of sexual harassment?	4.43	1.009
29. Would you consider forcefully kissing your co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	4.45	0.967
30. Would you consider offering a subordinate co-worker a higher position in exchange for sexual favors a form of sexual harassment?	4.48	0.953
31. Would you consider forcing unwanted sexual acts on a co-worker a form of sexual harassment?	4.5	0.968
32. Would you consider sending your co-worker an email with pornographic content a form of sexual harassment?	4.44	0.989
33. Would you consider poking, patting, or grazing our co-workers body a form of sexual harassment?	4.29	1.078
34. Would you consider begging your co-worker for a sexual favor a form of sexual harassment?	4.48	0.991

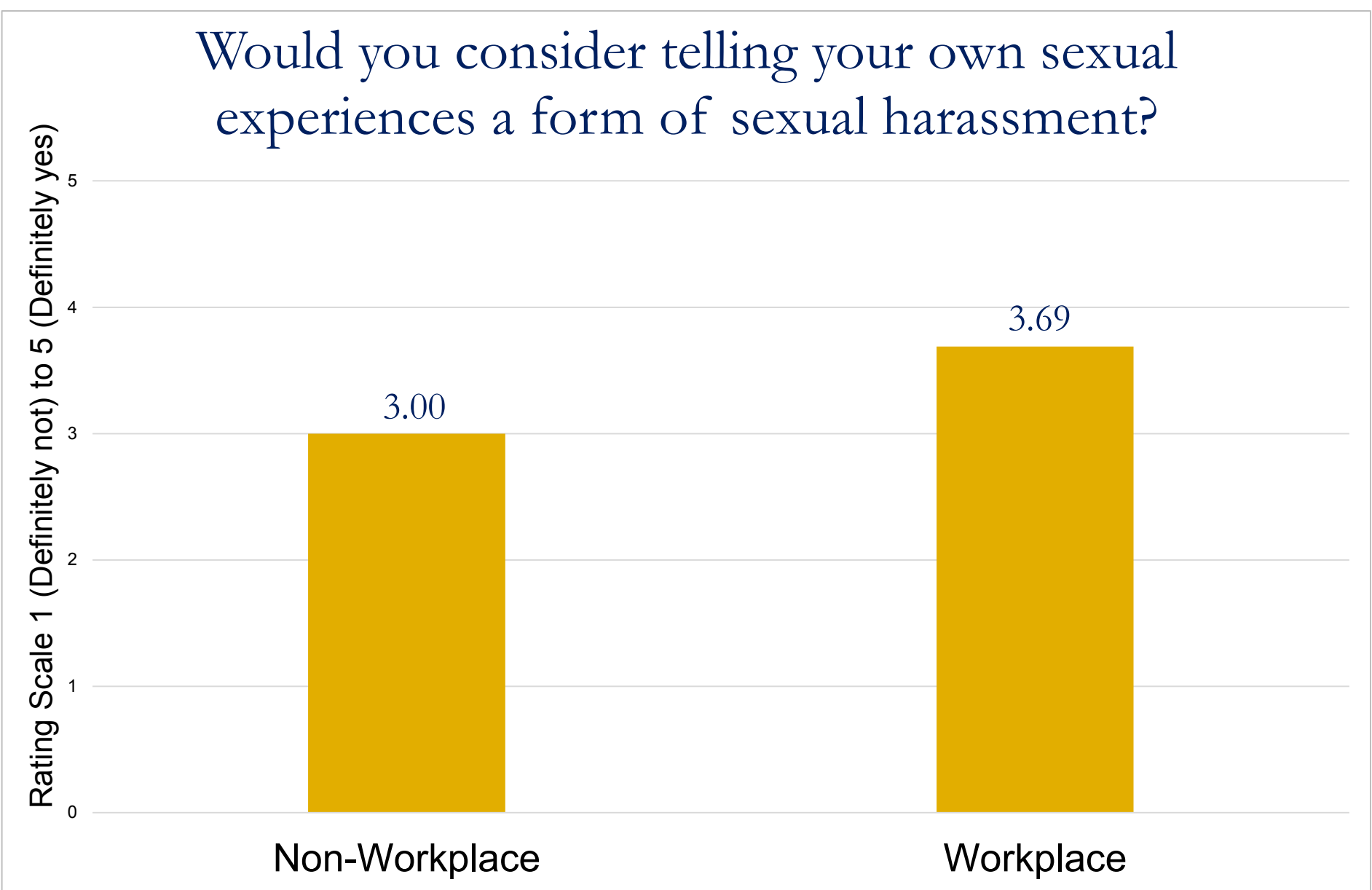
These bar charts display the means of various perceptions of sexual harassment in non-workplace and workplace settings.



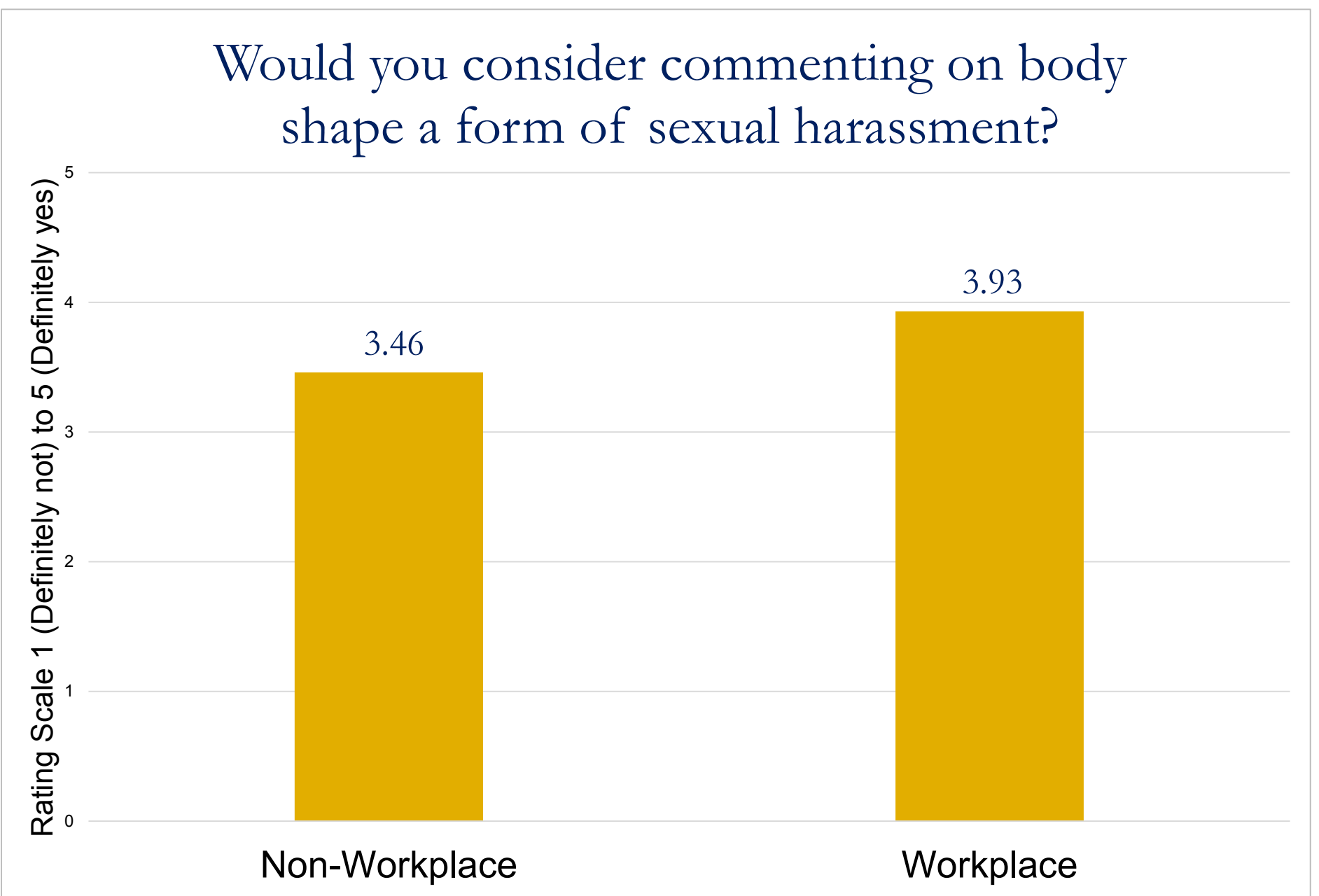
There was a significant effect for telling your sexual orientation, $t(206) = -8.84$ $p < .01$



There was a significant effect for referencing sexual stereotypes associated with race, $t(207) = -4.57$ $p < .01$



There was a significant effect for telling your own sexual experiences, $t(207) = -7.94$ $p < .01$



There was a significant effect for commenting on body shape, $t(206) = -6.08$ $p < .01$

Conclusion

We found that participants generally rated certain behaviors as sexual harassment differently based upon the contexts surrounding the behaviors, demonstrating that people have different behavioral definitions of sexual harassment across settings. Understanding that perceptions of sexual harassment are not consistent across environments is central to the task of defining what constitutes sexual harassment. Our study gives insight into how perceptions of sexual harassment can change depending on the environment one is in. The results of this study can be used to guide organizational and public policy.

References

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